



**florencecrittenton's**

Center for Pregnant & Parenting Teens

Mister Chair and Members of the subcommittee:

My name is Pam Ponich-Hunthausen and I am the Clinical Director of the Florence Crittenton Home and Services here in Helena. I have been a licensed therapist specializing in working with at-risk children and families in Montana for nearly 20 years. While I have worked for a variety of mental health agencies over these years, all of which I can attest provide excellent and much-needed services to children and families with mental health issues, I want to speak briefly about my experience at my current professional "home" – the "Florence Crittenton Home".

I initially came to Florence Crittenton about eight years ago as a therapist who just really loved working with tough, at-risk teens. What I have discovered is an amazing opportunity to impact not only this current generation, but the next (and the next, and the next). While all of the good work we all do across the state with Montana's kids will necessarily impact the trajectory of future generations, we at Florence Crittenton have the honor (and I truly do mean that this work is a great honor and privilege) to work not only with these young at-risk teen mothers but also with the next generation of THE most at-risk babies in our state. We actually get to be a part of changing the course of two lifetimes forever. And, what many do not know or understand, the PREVENTION work we are able to do with this next generation of at-risk children – is not funded by the state of MT at all. While we sometimes (not always) get a small stipend through state dollars to pay for the basics like food and diapers, we are paid nothing for the specialized services they receive in our care.

We currently have the capacity to serve 12 young moms and their children in our residential group home facility and are busily developing similar outpatient/outreach services to reach other teen parents and their children across the state. Our services target mental health issues as well as the risks associated with teen pregnancy and parenting; the youth we serve always have a multitude of challenges including chemical abuse and dependency issues, history of abuse and trauma, delinquency, running away and lifelong involvement in "the system". We realize that the time we get with these amazing, resilient, talented, loving kids may well change the course of their family's lives forever and we pour our hearts and souls into our work every day. Despite the passion the staff of Florence Crittenton brings to the job every day, we are, unfortunately, constantly limited by the resources and support we have to do our work well. This is difficult and demanding work and we have never been funded at a level to pay our staff near what they are worth. The fields of attachment, trauma-informed services and infant/toddler and adolescent mental health are ever-changing and we are dedicated to keeping our staff well-trained. But staff training and the constant provision of high quality services takes resources and we cannot continue to do this highly impactful and important work, with the most fragile and vulnerable at-risk children in Montana without the ongoing and increasing support of the state and the good work of our legislature.

On behalf of the staff of Florence Crittenton, I would like to genuinely thank you all for your hard work and service.

*changing the future ... two lives at a time*

To Whom It may concern, 1-18-12  
My experience at FCH was phenomenal. As a teen mom you don't really understand how bad you need people to support you. FCH changed my life in ways I will never forget. I struggled with, PTSD, anxiety, addiction, and depression. I needed a way to control my emotions and regulate my life to a more positive healthy way of living. FCH gave me the opportunity to do just that, to help me to understand that it's okay to feel alone and they showed me ways to live with mental health issues. They were there for me and gave me the will-power to truly know that I am okay and made me realize that there are ways to live with mental health issues FCH showed me numerous of ways to deal with my mental

health issues in a very healthy way. I have never felt so loved, so trusted, and so cared about in my life as I did at FCH. I was blessed with the opportunity to go to FCH, they helped me change my life forever. I will never forget the warming, loving atmosphere I lived in. I don't know where my daughter and I would be if I never went to FCH.

January 18, 2011



Dear Members of the Subcommittee:

Florence Crittenton Home and Services, a private, nonprofit that has been providing services to young parents and their children for 110 years. Our residential program has traditionally served young women from across the state, providing care for girls from every county in the state. Our facility is licensed as a therapeutic group home and the only maternity home in Montana. All clients receive group, individual and family therapy, prenatal and parenting education, life skills education and school support. Florence Crittenton also operates a fully licensed Child care program for infants and toddlers ages 2 and under.

Florence Crittenton currently has two contracts with the State of Montana to provide services for pregnant and parenting young women and their children. For FY 2010 contract fee were 50% of the total cost of providing care. Over the past four years contract fees have averaged 39.5% of the cost of providing care.

No business person would sign a contract that paid them 50% of the cost of a project with the understanding that they would then 'find' the rest of the cost of the project. Yet because children's very lives are at stake, this is what non-profit organizations do. We fight the good fight and agree to provide for children at the risk of not being able to pay our staff at the end of the month because there is not enough money in the checking account.

Every year, our program is in jeopardy of closing. There are several key points I would like you to consider as you consider funding and the need for programs.


Florence Crittenton relies on individual donors, family foundations and other grants to assist in covering the gap between service fees and the expenses of caring for two generations of Montana's Children. The children we serve are Montana's greatest asset and our legacy. More often than not they are part of a state system and the responsibility for their care has been given to the state. However, the cost of *providing* that care has been shifted to the organization. It is our responsibility to figure out how to fund the services that will best benefit these vulnerable young families.

In addition, donors are finding it harder to make significant gifts. According to Giving USA, donors reduced their gifts by 3.6 percent in 2009. Most of the decline was seen in significant individual gifts and family foundations. While numbers are not yet available for 2010, many experts expect them to be even more significant.

As a long standing Montana business, Florence Crittenton is an important part of Montana's economic climate. Florence Crittenton employs 38 staff, has an operating budget of \$1.9 million dollars and perhaps most importantly, gives vulnerable young families the tools they need to survive and potentially be self-sufficient.

In summary, organizations like Florence Crittenton provides more than a service to those in need – we are shaping the future of the state. Please consider the entire picture before reducing funding that will change the face of our next generation.

Sincerely,

  
Barbara Burton  
Executive Director

*changing the future ... two lives at a time*

I came to Florence Crittenton when I was 17 years old. My baby, Sophie was 4 months old. I had been having a tough time living at home, my mom kicked me out and I was struggling with being a mom. I didn't really want to spend time with my baby and I knew deep in my heart that I needed to change this. I didn't feel bonded with her and spent a lot of time away from her with my friends. I felt like there was a wall between me and my baby.

I called Florence Crittenton everyday to see if I could come. Eventually a space became available and I moved in. I am so glad that I was so persistent because my experience has totally changed me.

The people at Florence Crittenton really helped me to learn to bond with Sophie. I am so close to her now. I take her everywhere with me and never want to be apart from her. They have so much knowledge about parenting and being here has helped me feel like I can be a great mom to her. I feel confident that I am doing the right thing, even though sometimes it can be scary and I know the impact of everything I do for her will last a lifetime.

The staff do a really good job of making you feel at home and not like you are in a group home. They are really encouraging and the other girls are supportive and friendly too. There are rules like no tv. I thought I would die at first but now it doesn't phase me. I just want to be with my baby and spend time with her and I realize why its not healthy to always have the tv on. Now I tell other people to turn it off if we are with them!

There are great groups where I learnt a lot about myself and the individual and family therapy has helped improve my relationship with my family. The Independent Living Skills coordinator, Maureen taught me lots of really useful information. I learnt a lot about cooking through her and we did a lot of really fun activities.

This experience has opened up a whole new world to me. I feel like I was given a chance of a lifetime and I am definitely on the right track now. I want to go on and graduate and then go to college to be a nurse.

Hi my name is Shantel and I'm 18 yrs old, I have a 1 yr old daughter named Trinity. I started going to The Loving your baby class offered @ Florence Crittenton when I was 8 months pregnant. After I had my baby I got put in Florence Crittenton. I came there when I was 17 and Trinity was just 3 weeks old. I got sent there by my Probation Officer @ the time and it was the best decision for me and my baby. Now that I am not there anymore I find myself wishing I was back there sometimes because I had so much support and I met some amazing people when I was there. Even when I didn't want to be there I found myself with a huge smile on my face, they pulled me out of my comfort zone and had me do some things I prob never would have done and those were prob some of the fonnest times I've ever had. Florence Crittenton taught me alot on Parenting, Self-esteem, Life skills, and most importantly how to bond and play w/ my baby. Now I have been home for about 5 months and I'm working full time, I've got my own apt. and prob most important I've stayed out of trouble.